

## Preventing Food Poisoning in School Canteens

### What Is Food Poisoning?

Food poisoning comes from eating foods that contain high levels of food poisoning bacteria. The bacteria themselves may cause illness or the bacteria may have produced poisons (toxins) in the food that cause illness.

### What are the symptoms of food poisoning?

The common symptoms associated with food poisoning include diarrhoea, vomiting, nausea and stomach cramps. These usually occur within two to thirty-six hours of consumption of the food, although with some types of food poisoning, illness may not occur for days or even weeks. The last thing eaten is not necessarily the cause of the food poisoning.

The symptoms usually last between one and seven days, although this may be longer. You can pass on the infection to other people at any time during the period that you have the symptoms, and in some cases for some time after if you are not careful.

Bacteria type	Where can it be found?	What are the symptoms?	When do the symptoms occur?
SALMONELLA	Meat, poultry, eggs and egg products	Nausea, stomach cramps, diarrhoea, fever and headache	Six hours to 3 days after eating contaminated food. Symptoms can last up to 3 to 5 days
BACILLUS CEREUS	Cereals, rice, meat products and packet soups	Nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea and stomach cramps	One to six hours after eating the contaminated food. Symptoms usually last no longer than 24 hours
STAPHYLOCOCCUS AUREUS	Meat and poultry dishes, egg products, mayonnaise-based salads and custard-filled desserts	Acute vomiting, nausea, occasional diarrhoea and stomach cramps	Thirty minutes to 8 hours after eating contaminated food. Symptoms usually last 24 hours

### Why does food poisoning happen?

If food *isn't* cooked thoroughly or handled properly at the canteen, a child may get food poisoning.

Food poisoning bacteria are often present naturally in food but with the right conditions they can multiply very quickly! A single bacterium can multiply into more than two million bacteria in just seven hours.

### **It is VERY IMPORTANT not to give bacteria the conditions under which they can multiply.**

Bacterium grows best when the temperature is between 5°C and 60°C. This is called the **Temperature Danger Zone**. *Make sure that food is kept out of the Temperature Danger Zone for as long as possible.*



**Are there types of food which bacteria prefer?**

Yes, the following foods are known as 'potentially hazardous foods':

- Meat and Poultry
- Seafood
- Dairy products
- Eggs
- Small goods e.g. salami, ham and devon
- Cooked rice
- Cooked pasta
- Prepared salads e.g. coleslaw and pasta salad
- Prepared fruit salads

These 'potentially hazardous foods' if contaminated with food poisoning bacteria and then left in the **Temperature Danger Zone** can cause food poisoning.

**Workers in the school canteen can prevent food poisoning by:**

- Preventing food from being contaminated with bacteria by safe food handling practices
- Storing and handling food so that any bacteria cannot grow or multiply

**For food poisoning to occur there must be a chain of events:**

- There must be bacteria on the food.
- The bacteria must have the right conditions to grow:
  - Warmth - between 5°C and 60 °C
  - Moisture
  - Food
- The bacteria must have **time** to grow and multiply.

By preventing each of these you can break the *food poisoning chain* and prevent food poisoning.

**Practical ways canteen workers can break the food poisoning chain:**

- Make sure your hands are washed and thoroughly dried before handling food
- Do not touch food and money at the same time
- Thoroughly wash and sanitise all equipment used to prepare raw food including benches and chopping boards
- Store food in containers that are clean, non-toxic, easy to wash, have tight fitting lids or are covered with foil or plastic film
- Store raw food **BELOW** cooked food in the refrigerator
- Store food correctly. In particular do not keep food in the "temperature danger zone"
- Keep hot food hot (above 60°C) and cold food cold (below 5°C)
- Make sure food is served as soon as possible after preparing
- Thoroughly wash fruit and vegetables
- Always use food before the use by dates on packaging